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House of Representatives

LOOKING BACK ON 60 YEARS OF THE G.I. BILL AND FORWARD FOR OUR VETS!

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MR. FILNER: I thank the gentleman from Maine (Mr. Michaud) for his leadership on this and join with my colleagues in calling for this resolution, which commemorates the 60th anniversary of the GI Bill of Rights.

As the speakers before said, this is a perfect example of responsible and progressive government, and it was truly an economic stimulus package of far-reaching impact. Many authorities indicate that passage of this GI Bill of Rights paid for itself many times over and largely contributed to the post-World War II economic recovery.

Millions of veterans were helped in their transition from soldier to citizen through unemployment compensation, education benefits, and down payment on houses.

The chairman of the committee referred to the creation of the modern middle class. I can well remember after my father

volunteered in World War II, the working-class family that I was a part of had to move in with relatives and was renting a very small apartment.

After he came home, I remember 55 years later the incredible feeling of being able to move into our own home for the first time in our lives. With a few thousand dollars down payment, and with the new homes that were constructed by Levitt in New York, the American dream was made possible for working-class families, such as my own, with the help of the GI Bill of Rights. I will tell you that having a sense of your own home was incredibly beneficial to my own family.

So it is appropriate as we approach the 60th anniversary of the bill's enactment that we look back and celebrate the accomplishments of the greatest generation. I would hope also that as we think about this

(over)

GI bill, we look forward as well. We must honor the sacrifices of the men and women who make up the greatest generation, I think, by investing in the current generation of servicemen and women and provide them the necessary resources so they can succeed and continue the legacy of this greatest generation.

There are a lot of ways to do that. The chairman of the committee, the ranking member of the committee, have bills, for example, to make mandatory the funding of our health care system rather than rely on the appropriations process each year, where we fall behind, further and further, on the adequate health treatment of our veterans. We must get this on to a mandatory funding kind of scheme so we can give our veterans the health care they deserve.

The education provided for in the GI bill that we are celebrating today must be improved upon. We have tried to take steps forward, but right now it pays only \$985 a month to veterans who are attending college. And that does not go too far. There is legislation, such as H.R. 1713, the Montgomery GI Bill Improvements Act, that returns the GI bill to its original intent that we are celebrating today by providing full tuition to a public institution of higher learning, and books, fees, and a living stipend for veterans who are students.

Interestingly enough, did my colleagues know there is one group in World War II who were denied their rights under this GI bill that we are celebrating today? The Merchant Marines. The Merchant Mariners of World War II did not come under this bill

we are celebrating. They suffered the highest casualty rate of any of the branches of service, and we might say have become the forgotten service. No legislation was passed by this Congress to address their needs until 1988, when they too were granted a watered-down version of the GI Bill of Rights.

I have legislation, H.R. 3729, it is called The Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II, which will grant them compensation to partially make up, because we can never really make up for it, the 40 years they went without benefits that we are celebrating today, benefits that could have provided them, too, with an education and a home loan and a small business loan.

Other steps that we can take. We have a discharge petition number 8 sitting beside me that would help widows of veterans to achieve some measure of dignity in their old age. Those widows of servicemen and servicewomen who paid years into the Survivors Benefit Program will only get 35 percent of the retirement pension when they reach age 62. This is not sufficient for people to live on. This is not a sufficient thank-you for those who have been part of a family that have contributed to our Armed Forces and to our Nation's security.

So let us think as we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the GI Bill of Rights and celebrate that wonderful act, let us rededicate ourselves to the task that we have today. Let us honor past veterans by truly honoring present and future veterans in the best way possible by living up to the promises made by a grateful Nation.